

Letter from Mabel Hubbard Bell to Eliza Symonds Bell, February 27, 1878, with transcript

Letter from Mrs. Alexander Graham Bell to Mrs. Alexander Melville Bell. 57 West Gromwell Road, South Kensington, February 27th., 1878. My dear Mrs. Bell:

Your very welcome letter of the 11th., has just come. Since I last wrote we had another telling me of the thoughtful gift on its way to us. You could not have chosen anything more useful and welcome. Of course nobody else would have thought of it and I had been wondering what I should do about getting one myself. I am waiting most impatiently until Lewis arrives with it and with my silver. The only coffee pot we have now is the one that the coffee is made in, in the kitchen and the faucet is on a level with the table, so whenever I want to pour out the coffee, I have to push it to the edge of the table, and run the risk of having stray drops of coffee on my dress or the carpet. Thank you very very much for sending them both.

Thank you for telling me of the remedy that cured Mary but Chester says no local application will do Alec any good. He is at present in a low state of health and Cheater says the best cure is for him to eat lose meat and take more exercise. When he is stronger the trouble will disappear, and indeed it is much better now, there is no discharge only little red spots.

Alec has gone out of town with Mr. Alexander Beattie, manager of the Eastern Railway, to dine with a Mr. Fielden M . P . I did not know before that being an M. P. was such a distinguished honor, but it seems so, for I have heard so much of Mr. Fielden, M . P . he is never simply Mr . Fielden.

The house feels very quiet and lonely now but I am glad of it, for I am tired out after an expedition into town after a birthday present for Alec. I wanted to give him an enlarged

Library of Congress

photograph of Pluscarden Abbey, framed for his study, but I could not find the small one we have. Then I tried to get a nice frame for the Diploma of the Centennial, but could not find any pretty one. At last we settled on a set of chessmen, and board. It is not a very expensive present but I think Alec will like it, for he has often wished for one, that he might teach me how to play in the evenings, You know he belongs exclusively to me, and to his friends every evening from eight until ten, and I assure you, that I for one prize this right very much, others seem to too, for we are very seldom alone, either Mr. Home or some chance visitor drop in and stay until Alec gives some hint of sending me to bed or going to work, and then, they leave us alone for a rosy half hour.

I am feeling horribly disgusted, for we are engaged to dine with Mr. and Mrs. Morgan-Brown tomorrow evening and yesterday came a card from the Baroness Burdett-Coutts saying she would be "At Home" tomorrow, I want to go very very much for of course her brilliant rooms will be crowded by just the people most worth meeting and even if one did nothing else, it would be joy sufficient to identify them, and stare at them to ones hearts content and besides Alec says this is the very last week of our going out, after this I must stay at home, even if the Queen herself invited us to Court. I am going tomorrow to see Lady Jones and her two eldest daughters dressed in their court dresses before going to the Queens Drawing room tomorrow afternoon. According to Lady Jones account the trains are something tremendous in their length, reaching several yards on the ground. It would be delightful if Alec could see them for he made me take quarter of a yard off my new Paris black silk which was only three yards from the waist, utterly declining to take his wife about with such a "long tail".

Alec dined yesterday with a Captain Arthur of her Majesty's Navy. It was on board his ship that those experiments were made with the telephone in divers helmets which resulted in saving the life of a man. The Lords of the Admiralty or their acting representatives directed Captain Arthur to put himself in communication with Alec and give him every assistance in his power in any experiment he might want to make. So on Monday Alec is going down to Portsmouth to begin the experiments. I am invited too if I want to come and I do,

Library of Congress

but fear to be in the way. Saturday evening we are to have a dinner party I believe. Mr. Pierce and Mr. Taylor are invited I wish Alec could have waited until we have another servant the work is too hard for Mary Home so we must have another. I am afraid Emma wants to leave because the work is too hard, but she has said nothing to us yet. She is wonderfully stupid about everything outside her own duties but she does what she has to do very well, and is pleasant and kind so we should be sorry to lose her. The shops are full of "Domestic" Telephones, the little Lovers Telegraph of America, wherever you go on newspaper stands, news stores, stationers, photographers, toy shops fancy goods shops, you see the eternal little black box with red face, and the word "Telephone" in large black letters. Advertisements say that 700,000 have been sold in a few weeks. More serious infringements of Alec's patent abound cheap telephones, at 8/- to 15/- a pair. These are not sold outright, the purchaser buys a box with a bar magnet iron plate a coil a wooden handle and a mouth piece in it and then puts them together himself in five minutes. This is called respecting Alec's patent. They are not infringers because they do not sell telephones. Col. Reynold's is beginning active measurements to stop the infringers. The other day his lawyer sent a young man to buy telephones at all the different places. One man said he had sold 600 in one week (I think). — One day Col. Reynold's advertisement threatened all makers, sellers, or users of illegal telephones appeared in the Daily Telegraph above another offering the materials for making such telephones, for sale. Mr. Bell must not think we have forgotten his birthday. I do not know if Alec has already written or not. He has been feeling so miserably for so long that he may not have done so, but he has spoken of it, and longed to be with you now. I hope Mr. Bell is having a very happy birthday. Please give him my love and very best wishes for another happy year, and many happy returns of the day. I wish I could say something more but I never was good at doing more than just to send my love.

Dear Mrs. Bell you must not think you have lost your son because he is so far away. It is very such against his will that he stays each day. Nothing but his love for me and what he feels to be dire necessity keeps him away from you so long. It seems to me sometimes he

Library of Congress

longs for home even more than I do, though women generally feel their separation from home and friends most.

I will try and write again soon, but it gets harder to bend forward for any length of time and otherwise I cannot write. So please do not be alarmed if my letters are irregular. Alec will write if anything goes wrong.

With much love to you and Mr. Bell and the Miss Symonds,

Affectionately, Your daughter, Mabel.